

OU aims to tackle community issues

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Oakland University's President Gary Russi wants to apply OU's resources to solve difficult community-wide issues.

Russi, who has been at the helm of the near-19,000-student university that straddles Auburn Hills and Rochester Hills for 15 years, is looking for business and community leaders to lend their expertise to help carry out the mission.

The Creating the Future II initiative "really came about because of the situation in the economy and what is going around us," said Russi.

OU Chairman Henry Baskin said the initiative is designed to engage hundreds of civic and business leaders in a "visionary dialogue" that will help put Michigan's economy on the road to recovery. The endeavor could also make OU a bigger player in the Michigan and national scene.

Russi said: "Our hope is to start a retreat in 2011. It will be a one-day retreat that will bring together panelists and experts from all over the country to look at key areas of major social concern we should be interacting with and to talk about university resources and assets."

It will be this group that will determine the topics of several task forces that will then look at the university's strategic plan and its resources and assets before making recommendations.

He said the public state university already has outreach programs, but he expects the task forces to suggest better ways to have an impact on the community, state and nation.

"It is critical to get top-flight people who are engaged in the community and value the community and want to see it advanced," he said.

Such likely topics could include economy, health care, energy and security, he said.

For example, "Health care is a big issue right now — how to deal with the addition of 30 to 40 million to the insured rolls," said Russi, who is excited about the prospect of a new OU-Beaumont Hospital medical school on the campus in the near future.

Task forces are expected to present formal recommendations to the university's board of trustees in June 2011 and, pending approval, they will be implemented as part of both short-term and long-term strategic planning.

Russi is searching for names of people who could be on the task forces.

“We are reaching out throughout the community internally and externally and asking for names of individuals who can be ideal candidates to join us in the efforts. We have a little over 1,500 names submitted so far.

“The more we have as candidates, the better the result will be,” Russi said.

Creating the Future II also will focus on how the university can play a pivotal role in addressing concerns that have a national impact on research and education.”

Baskin and other board members support the initiative.

“Any effort to get the country’s key strategists and most respected academic and entrepreneurial minds to join the initiative and promote the rich intellectual resources that Oakland University has to offer can only bring about a positive result,” said Baskin.

“I cannot think of a better way for OU to assist in addressing the region’s most critical and pressing needs.”

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